



NEWS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

ILLINOIS MAN PLEADS GUILTY TO COCAINE, MARIJUANA CONSPIRACY

JEFFERSON CITY, Mo. – Todd P. Graves, United States Attorney for the Western District of Missouri, announced that an Illinois man pleaded guilty in federal court today to participating in a conspiracy to distribute cocaine and marijuana.

Esteban Rivera, 23, of Romeoville, Ill., pleaded guilty before U.S. District Judge Scott O. Wright this morning to participating in a conspiracy to distribute 100 kilograms or more of marijuana and 500 grams or more of cocaine in Columbia, Mo., from September 2000 to Nov. 24, 2002. He is the third defendant to plead guilty to the federal indictment.

Esteban Rivera admitted that he accompanied co-defendant **Juan Carlos Rivera**, 30, also of Romeoville, Ill., to make a drug transaction. They drove from Romeoville to meet another co-defendant, **Brian P. Wheeler**, 25, of Columbia, Mo., for the transaction in St. Louis, Mo. They were arrested on Nov. 24, 2002, when the vehicle driven by **Juan Carlos Rivera**, which was under surveillance by law enforcement officers, was stopped by a Missouri State Highway Patrol trooper on Interstate 55. While searching the vehicle with the aid of a drug-sniffing dog, officers found two large plastic bags containing marijuana in the trunk, and a brown paper bag containing cocaine in the rear wheel well.

On Sept. 26, 2003, **Juan Carlos Rivera** and **Wheeler** both pleaded guilty to participating in the narcotics conspiracy.

Under federal statutes, each defendant could be subject to a mandatory minimum sentence of five years in federal prison without parole, up to 40 years, plus a fine up to \$2 million. Their sentences will be determined according to the United States Sentencing Guidelines. Sentencing hearings will be scheduled after the completion of presentence investigations by the United States Probation Office.

This case is being prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorney Jim Lynn. It was investigated by the Missouri State Highway Patrol, the Illinois State Highway Patrol, the Drug Enforcement Administration, and the Columbia, Mo., Police Department.

This news release, as well as additional information about the office of the United States Attorney for the Western District of Missouri, is available on-line at
www.usdoj.gov/usao/mow